

Sermon Shabbat November 27 2015

I feel it, I feel such a good vibe being in here tonight. You feel it, everybody? You feel it? Does it feel good to be here tonight? Does it feel good after Thanksgiving, after gratitude?

You got your show of gratitude? I feel the spirit of God in here right now. The presence of that mystery.

And don't let the God name get in the way. It's just a nickname. God's a four-letter word in our tradition.

Yir he vav he, yeah. It's hard to believe that a week has passed, and last Saturday night we were gathered here with Reverend Alistair, and with three other communities, the Rivers of Living Waters, and the Nurashki-Jirahi Order, and Romimum. Two Christians, two priests, an imam and a rabbi walked into a church.

Sacred sounds. The assumption was that the word shalom, which means peace, doesn't mean the absence of complexity. Shalom, peace, isn't simple.

In fact, the great Rabbi Kook, the first chief rabbi of Palestine, in his commentary, Olat Re'iya, on the Siddur, on the prayer book, says something profound. He says that every morning in traditional liturgies, we say, V'rav shalom banayich, al tagri banayich, ele ba'onayich, that tamidei chachamim, scholars are called children, but the rabbis playfully misread it as builders. They're called builders.

And that they bring shalom to the world, says the text. And Rav Kook asks, what kind of shalom have Talmudic scholars ever brought into the world? If anyone has ever been around Talmudic scholars, they take one piece of text and they break it like builders into many pieces, and then they try to reconstruct it like Humpty Dumpty. What kind of shalom, what kind of peace can come from deconstruction? And Rav Kook writes there very beautifully, you think the word shalom means the absence of conflict? He says, no, it's the all-encompassing container for multitudes.

Even things that contradict can be held in the vessel called peace, shalom. In fact, he writes, that's the only way that it happens. Shalom is a higher order of a previous level of complexity.

What maybe Einstein would say, problems don't get resolved on the level at which they arise, but at a level above that. Shalom is that precipice from which we can hold many pieces, many of which we otherwise would not be able to hold. Yeah, does that make sense? Yeah, does that make sense? So, it's interesting that this character, Jacob, this character, Jacob, this character, Jacob, is, we're told, Vayavo Yaakov shalem shechem, that Yaakov comes shalem whole.

He comes complete at the end of this week's reading. This is after he has wrestled with some Ish, some person. And the Torah tells us that he comes whole.

But those who know the story know the problem with that is that he's limping. Jacob has wrestled with an angel, and he is limping, and he arrives, says the text, shalom, shalem,

whole, complete. What kind of brokenness can make Jacob whole? What kind of peace does he need, P-I-E-C-E, that needs to make peace with him so that he can be at peace in his wound? The great therapist Carl Jung said something that I'll never forget.

He said that all neurosis is an excuse for legitimate suffering. That all neurosis, all character structure that is symptomatically presenting itself as a problem isn't the problem, obviously. It's an excuse for something that is needing to be legitimately suffered.

And Jacob, man, Jacob, he's been carrying a load. He's been running away. That's his M-O.

That's Jacob's M-O. Jacob gets scared, he runs. Jacob gets scared, he deceives.

Jacob gets scared, he splits the camp. Jacob is dominated by fear. If you look in the Torah, the Jacob narratives, vayeira yaakov, he is afraid, vayeir yaakov, vayitzerlo, he's a terrified guy.

He's always afraid. Jacob, what are you afraid of? vayeivaser yaakov labado, and Jacob is alone. And Shmuel Klissner says the word vayeivater, that he was left alone, is an oral homonym.

It shares the word vayeivater with a vet, which means to split. And Jacob was split alone. There was nobody else around, and he started doing the fight club.

vayeir ki lo yachol lo, he saw that he could not overcome himself. He saw that he could not. He couldn't overcome the healthy part of him that wanted to be done with the charade, to be done with the games, to be done with the masks. vateka akaf yerecho, and he dislocates his hip, and as Rabbi Jason Rubenstein said last year in a beautiful reading, he said, Jacob finally has to slow down. The running away Jacob has to now limp away. You can't escape when you're limping.

His disability enables him to finally come to terms with who he is. His limping self now must actually slow down. His limping self must now finally get it.

And in a great moment, he screams to himself, what's my name? And is given Yisrael, the one who wrestles. Jacob will be only as whole, only as shalem, as his ability to be true and honest with his wound, with what he's carrying that he refuses to look at. The dislocated area, the gid hanashe, the sciatic nerve, the gid hanashe, is also, says Shmuel Klistner, the vein of forgetting.

Gid hanashe, the vein of nashe, of forgetting. What does he forget? He forgets that he's running. He forgot that years and years ago, there was a little Jacob that probably just wanted to get a blessing, and here he is in this character, formed as it were, and that's it. It's done, until finally he's had enough, and his terror brings him to the point of saying, I'm done running. Now I will limp, and in my limping, in my wound, in my vulnerability, in my legitimate suffering, I'll be whole again. Holding all of those pieces.

Holding all of the complexities, all of the different parts, all of the Jacob-ness. This is hard spiritual work. There is so much self-deception that is involved.

We can fool ourselves so frequently. We can fool others so frequently. The war with our own desire to run.

We have to surrender. So here's our work. Here's what I want you to do.

We've been working the entire year on what does it mean. What are the Tories, what's it telling us? So the first thing to do is, am I running away? What am I running from? Just stop running. Slow down.

The Tao Te Ching says the slow overcomes the fast. So slow down long enough to feel. Two, allow yourself to feel the wound.

And three, give yourself a new name. Aren't you that one that always X, Y, no, no, you must have me mistaken. Every situation has a name.

This is the way that I react. So no, no, I have a new name now. Right, does that make sense? I have a new name.

Usually I get angry right about now, and it takes me five minutes, but I'm not giving that up, because that's my pattern, and that's good, I like that. I know who I am, I'm Yaakov, I'm in this place. So no, no, no, Israel, I have a new name.

Wherever you run, wherever you feel the wound, feel those two, slow down, give yourself a new name. That's the work of being Yaakov, and that's the more important work of becoming Israel. Please rise.